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UNCLAS SECTION 01 OF 02 MELBOURNE 000006

SENSITIVE

SIPDIS

E.O. 12958: N/A

TAGS: [PTER](#) [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [IS](#) [AS](#)

SUBJECT: Anti-Israel Protests in Melbourne and Adelaide

REF: A) 08 SYDNEY 285, B) 08 Canberra 909, C) 08 Melbourne 117

Summary

1. (SBU) Melbourne-based "Women for Peace" intends to hold a small vigil in front of the consulate building on January 9 to protest events in Gaza. So far, protesters have organized four rallies elsewhere in Melbourne and Adelaide over the past ten days condemning Israeli airstrikes and ground attacks. Pro-Israel supporters staged their own rally, calling for an end to " Hamas terror." All protests have been peaceful so far and have generally refrained from targeting the United States. Tasmania and the Northern Territory remain quiet. Although Melbourne is home to more than 100,000 Muslims, the motivating force behind the anti-Israel rallies has been non-religious organizations. End Summary.

Melbourne

2. (SBU) Victoria Police notified post on January 8 that the "Women for Peace: No Weapons, No War" organization plans to hold a seven-person vigil in front of the U.S. Consulate on January 9 from 10:00 AM to 2:00 PM. The vigil is intended to express concern for women and children who have been injured or killed in Gaza. According to their website, Women for Peace is a Melbourne-based women's organization formed in 2002 in response to the 9/11 terrorist attacks and ensuing conflicts in Iraq and Afghanistan. They condemn all "war, acts of terrorism and manufacture of weapons." The group has conducted several peaceful protests in front of the consulate building in the past. Post will follow up in cable or email format if the January 9 vigil occurs.

3. (SBU) Approximately 1,000 people gathered in Melbourne's central business district on January 4 to protest Israeli airstrikes and ground incursion in Gaza, according to the Victoria Police. While the protesters generally avoided expressing anti-U.S. sentiment, they dismantled a Star of David and burned it along with an Israeli flag. Protesters called for a free Palestine and held posters depicting bloodied corpses of children. A similar 500-person, non violent protest was held in Melbourne on December 28 accompanied by Hezbollah flags and condemnation of Israeli military action. According to Victoria Police, the Socialist Alternative, a university based spin-off of the International Socialist Organization, organized both Melbourne rallies.

4. (U) Melbourne's Imams reportedly hosted the "biggest ever cry for Gaza" in the city's Broadmeadows suburb on January 4. Protesters

again criticized Israeli military action in Gaza while religious leaders made speeches and invoked prayers.

15. (SBU) Pro-Israel protesters also staged a rally in front of Victoria's Parliament house with banners stating: "no more terror" and "Hammas uses human shields." Speakers at the pro-Israel rally reportedly included the federal Parliament's only Jewish member, Michael Danby, and Liberal Party Senator from Victoria, Mitch Fifield. An article in Melbourne's daily Age noted that Jewish organizations, schools and synagogues have been the target of abusive phone calls and letters since Israel commenced attacks in Gaza. Jewish people have also reportedly been verbally abused on the streets. (Note: There is no Israeli consulate in Melbourne. End note.) According to Victoria Police, all gatherings in the state have been conducted peacefully with the full cooperation of law enforcement authorities.

Adelaide and Elsewhere

16. (SBU) On December 30, approximately 80 people gathered on the steps of the State Parliament building in Adelaide to protest Israel's military campaign in Gaza. Police told post that they did not observe any anti-U.S. sentiment during the rally. According to contacts in South Australia's police force, the protest was peaceful and organized by the "Australian Friends of Palestine." The group defines itself as a "voluntary, not-for-profit organization which has as its primary object the promotion of peace in Palestine based on international law and relevant UN resolutions." Law enforcement contacts in the Northern Territory and Tasmania report that there have been no significant anti-Israel rallies in those states.

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Comment

17. (SBU) Although Melbourne is home to more than 100,000 Muslims, the primary motivating force behind the anti-Israel protests have been non-religious organizations. This is at least partially because Melbourne's Muslim community, similar to Sydney's, is heavily divided along ethnic lines. Turks comprise the largest majority of Melbourne's Muslim community, accounting for more than 70,000 residents. Lebanese, Somali, Sudanese, Ethiopian, Eritrean, Baltic European, Iranian, Afghan, Pakistani and Iraqi Melbournians make up the remainder of the community. While controversial issues such as the Benbrika terror trial (refs B and C) have temporarily united these disparate groups, Melbourne's Muslim communities remain divided and are primarily motivated by individual ethnic concerns.

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